

Washington, DC – Today, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA – 07) voted to support H.R. 2419, the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, which will expand food security programs, conserve vital natural resources, promote healthier foods and local food networks, and reform commodity and biofuel programs to reflect the priorities of the nation. The measure passed 318-106. — “Among other provisions, this bill reauthorizes funding for food stamps and increases assistance to food banks to help out those American families who are struggling during this time of economic uncertainty,” said the Congressman. “In addition, it promotes renewable energy and increases conservation funding under a pay-as-you-go government, protecting our environment and our food sources for the long term, thus ensuring our security.”

He added that while the bill was not perfect, it represents a compromise. He said that the benefits of the bill for both his district and for the nation outweighed any problematic provisions, such as the cut in funding for the Grassland Reserve and Wetlands Reserve programs and the high cap on farm subsidies.

Congressman Sestak had previously voted for an amendment sponsored by Rep. Ron Kind, which would have cut subsidies to wealthy farmers to nearly zero, but this legislation did not make it into the final bill. The Congressman will continue to work for this and similar provisions, but said that the fact that nutrition programs composed 74 percent of the final legislation outweighed the issues he had with the subsidies portion of the bill.

Specifically, this bill will ensure our food security by increasing nutrition programs by more than \$10 billion, including increasing funding by \$1.02 billion for USDA Snack Programs that help school children and low-income families. In addition, food bank assistance will be increased by \$1.25 billion. It also raises the minimum standard deduction for the Food Stamp Program and excludes special combat pay from eligibility requirement. It expands the Commodity Supplemental Program to include vouchers to buy fresh fruits & vegetables.

The bill also promotes renewable energy sources, so that we can lower our dependence on foreign oil. For instance, it provides \$1.1 billion to fund programs that will help the renewable energy industry invest in new technologies that use a variety of sources beyond feed grains. It also reduces the corn ethanol tax credit and redirects incentives for cellulosic ethanol. Furthermore, it creates a loan guarantee program and a program to encourage and develop production of dedicated energy crops and increases bioenergy research and expands renewable energy programs.

At the same time, the bill includes provisions to protect the environment, and increases conservation program spending by \$7.9 billion. It also doubles the funding for the Farm Protection Program to protect agricultural lands from urban and suburban development. It also increases funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program.

This bill also reforms farm programs and sets for the first time a hard cap on the dollar amount of payments given to farmers. Transparency into this payment process is increased, which will result in an end to practice that result in multiple payment eligibility. Furthermore, it includes crop insurance reforms to prevent windfall reimbursements to crop insurance companies and budgets standing disaster assistance program for crops stricken by catastrophic natural disasters such as drought and flood

Finally, the bill strengthens the U.S. commitment to providing international food aid, and provides \$60 million to purchase food overseas to feed people in need on top of the existing Food for Peace international aid program, along with an evaluation of this change and its effect on U.S. response times. Furthermore, it reauthorizes the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program for infant, child, and school nutrition programs in underdeveloped countries and provides an infusion of \$84 million in additional funding.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.